

Book Reviews

ZOOLOGY

The Uses and Curation of Birds' Egg Collections: An Examination and Biography

By Martin Limbert. Peregrine Books, 27 Hunger Hills Avenue, Horsforth, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS18 5JS. Hardcover. 97 pages, £31 which includes postage to Canada if paid by postal money order.

This book was written largely to explain why egg collections should be preserved and to counter negative attitudes in Britain, where egg collecting has been illegal for half a century. Sadly, some museums have progressively removed birds' eggs from public display and consigned them instead to storage and, often, neglect. The need for and methods of careful preservation of surviving egg collections are discussed in some detail.

There is much here of historical interest. Systematic egg collecting in England dates back at least to 1662. Hewitson in 1831 coined the term, "oology." Overzealous collecting at times contributed to species' declines. Egg set data are valuable in mapping distribution limits of individual bird species, but errors in identification and outright fraud by some egg dealers mean that some cannot be accepted at face value; the Canadian example of Walter Raine is mentioned in this regard.

Limbert points out that nests and eggs have yet to be described for up to three thousand bird species in the world, and much information from extant collections has not yet been shared. Only recently, numerous egg collections were studied to analyse 12 000 clutches of the Common Cuckoo, thereby adding greatly to our understanding of the extent of variation in size and colour of cuckoo eggs deposited in the nests of different hosts. Phenologic investigation reveals the extent to which the eggs are laid earlier in warmer

years. Eggs are occasionally useful in determining phylogenetic relationships of unusual species such as the Sandgrouse. Preserved contents of eggs can be saved for pesticide analysis. And, as modern ornithologists learned from Ratcliffe in 1962, egg-shell thinning has been an indicator of pesticide burdens and thus a method of monitoring the environment.

Of interest to many readers will be the gastronomic aspects of seabird egg-collecting on cliffs, especially the abundant and highly palatable egg of the Common Guillemot at Flamborough. Later, eggs from this guillemot colony became celebrated among oologists for their variety of marking and colour.

This book deals almost exclusively with oological matters – and oology publications – concerning Great Britain. Thirty-three valuable pages of bibliography are given, citing mainly European sources; the landmark American publications of Bent, Bendire and Reed are not included. Oology periodicals began forty years later in Britain than those in the United States, but ceased publication about the same time as the *Oologist*, the last survivor in America.

I detected one error in terminology, the use of "extinction" from one country of a species surviving elsewhere; he should have used "extirpation." This attractive, but expensive, little book is recommended to anyone interested in the British approach to past bird's egg collections.

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Birds of Nunavut: A Checklist

By James M. Richards, Y. Robert Tymstra, and Anthony W. White. Birders Journal, 701 Rossland Road East, Suite 393, Whitby, Ontario L1N 9K3 Canada 21 pages. Canadian \$8. Paper plus \$1.50 postage.

This attractive booklet lists 254 confirmed species, including 124 that are known to breed, plus 9 hypothetical species. Separate codes in columns give status codes for abundance and breeding for three arbitrary geographic subdivisions, "Mainland" (most but not all of the former territory of Keewatin), "Arctic Islands," and "Bay Islands" (south of sixty degrees). As evidence that birding knowledge of Nunavut is increas-

ing rapidly, 48 confirmed species have been added during the three years immediately prior to publication. An excellent map is unusually helpful because it gives both the former English names and the Inuktitut names (new for most of us) for each settlement, many of which were initially Hudson's Bay Company fur trading posts. There are two pages of bibliography. All in all, this is a commendable work in progress, and the price is within easy reach.

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